And a Partridge in a Pear Tree

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And a Partridge in a Pear Tree

by matchboxbones

Summary

The Twelve Days of Christmas done the way a budding photojournalist with a crush on his high school art teacher would.

Notes

Ah, I know this is a little late for Christmas, but in my defense I didn't get an AO3 account until April. This was written about two days before Christmas as a present to my friend Brigette who lives very far away and has a weakness for teacher/student fics.

(10/29/2014) Edit: So excited to announce that this fic has been translated into Russian by doctor_what!

The first time Gerard receives one of the notes, he is returning from his lunch break in the high school cafeteria. A small, white envelope is placed carefully in the center of the mess he calls his desk, and he manages to give himself a wicked paper cut while attempting to rip it open. The envelope itself only consists of an unsigned note that says, *Did you know that, in some places, the partridge is considered a symbol of intense, but often unrequited, love? Kind of sad, don't you think?*

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The second note Gerard receives is in a large 8x10 manila envelope and contains not only another note, but a set of two different photographs picturing a pair of doves being released at a wedding. The first print shows the hands of a newly wedded couple each holding a dove, while the second print shows the doves talking flight with nothing but a clear blue sky as a backdrop.

He knows, with the skill of anyone whose life revolves around art, that the shots are extremely well done. They are, perhaps, a little unsure, as though the photographer was young, or inexperienced, but with enough natural talent to make up for the lack of proper training.

Gerard runs his fingers over the tiny "F.I. '11" printed in black ink on the bottom right-hand corner of each photograph, eyebrows pushing together in confusion. He frowns, setting the photographs down in favor of picking up the handwritten note, which reads, *Turtle doves are emblems of devoted love. Isn't it silly that wedding doves*
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aren't even doves at all? All these people getting married, thinking they're all symbolic and shit, and they don't even have the right bird.

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In the same fashion as the others before it, the third 8x10 manila envelope is on his desk when he returns from the cafeteria; inside are more photographs and another unsigned note. This time there are three photographs. Each print is of three fluffy-footed hens; one is of them pecking at the seeds on the ground and another shows the group in a line. The final shot is of the hens nestled together for warmth, beaks tucked against the feathers of the closest bird.

The "F.I. '11" signature rests again at the bottom right-hand corner. Gerard pulls the note out of the envelope, briefly wondering why the mysterious note-leaver doesn't sign the notes themselves, but finds it perfectly okay to leave a signature on the photographs.

Chickens are apparently a symbol of the futility of hope, the note reads, *because of how they survive for a little while after their heads are chopped off. Sometimes I wonder if hoping for you is like that. Like maybe you won't notice me even after I've done all this. Like that chicken's gonna die even after struggling for a little while.*

That was a shitty analogy. It probably doesn't even make sense.

I'm not really good with words.
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By the time the fourth note arrives, Gerard realizes that somehow he has a managed to acquire a secret admirer of sorts. As a child to his late teens he'd been withdrawn from the world, hidden away in his basement, content to watch horror movies and read comic books sunup to sundown, and create works of art that no one would ever see. If not for the fact that he had been forced to venture into the real world by his brother, he would have been happy staying underground for the remainder of his life.

He's never really had a secret admirer before and, despite telling himself otherwise, he gets a little bit excited when he sees that the stranger has left another note in its familiar spot on his desk.

Gerard carefully retrieves four 8x10 photographs of crows from the envelope, inspecting them closely before moving on to read the note.

The original writers didn't mean 'calling,' did you know that? 'Calling' is actually an Americanization of the word 'colly,' meaning black. For some people, black birds are a good omen. I guess that's a good thing, since the black birds follow the chickens and their fucking 'futility of hope' shit.

P.S. We don't have black birds in Jersey, so you get the next best thing.
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“F.I.” leaves Gerard another envelope on Friday.

Enclosed are five close-up shots of hands. The hands in each photograph are from two different people, clasped together, fingers interlocked, and wedding bands glinting in the sunlight. Some of the hands are from younger couples, but the others are from couples much older, from couples who hold on to each other as thought they’ve spent nearly the entirety of their lives with one another.

Gerard can’t ignore the way his heart catches in his chest when he reads, *You always look so lonely. I don’t want you to feel lonely. You deserve someone, even if it isn’t me.*

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The sixth note arrives on the following Monday and holds six prints of geese on the front lawn of the school. The school is unfocused in the background, but it’s definitely the high school Gerard has worked at for the past four years. Even though he’s suspected for awhile that the sender must associated with the school in some way, proof of his suspicions is still a little strange.

The sender’s note inside the envelope reads, *I once read somewhere that geese live by the same motto as the marines, “semper fidelis,” or “always faithful.” If one of the flock is injured during flight, another goose will stay with*

the injured until it has recovered, or until it has taken its final breath. Until death do us part?

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The sender must be a fellow staff member, Gerard decides after receiving the seventh note, or maybe just someone with a talent at picking locks. Gerard wonders if he should maybe be at least a little disturbed at the possibility of having an expert lock-pick as his secret admirer. Mostly he wonders if he shouldn't be so charmed at the possibility that someone is willing to pick locks in order to leave him secret letters.

Seven photographs of swans are in the envelope in addition to the standard unsigned note.

Did you know that swans mate for years? Some of them mate for their entire lives.

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Gerard only realizes what his secret admirer is doing when eight photographs of cows being milked are enclosed in the manila envelope the following day. The person milking the cows is an older woman, around sixty years old, with her skin tough and weathered from being outdoors over the years.

Milkmaids don’t really exist anymore. There are people who milk cows, or make butter and shit from the milk they get, but it’s not like a thing women are supposed to do. Three cheers for equality?

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“Nine ladies dancing,” Gerard sings under his breath, looking again through the nine photographs he had received earlier that day. He’s taken to tacking the prints to the blank space above his bed at home. The wall has been blank since he bought the house a little over a year ago, and nothing he ever put up before seemed right until now.

No shot out of nine is of the whole woman. One picture is of her hand clasped in the hand of the man with whom she dances. Another is of the man’s hand at her waist. Yet another is of her legs, mint green dress swirling around her knees as she dances across the ballroom floor with her partner. His favorite shot is of her smile.

She looks absolutely and utterly happy.

He wants to be that happy.

He dreams that night of hands and lips on skin, burning hot to the touch, mouths moving wet and warm. Gerard wakes in the morning covered in sweat, painfully aroused, and knowing with absolute certainty of whom he was dreaming.

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The tenth note is accompanied, as usual, by another set of photos. They are, much like others, stunning. The note this time, however, says nothing related to the “ten lords-a-leaping” verse of the song, and instead reads, *Do you ever read the school newspaper? I’ve never seen you with it.*

Gerard takes the hint for what it is and as he heads home later that evening, he stops at the door to grab one of the remaining newspapers.

He avoids looking at it until after he’s eaten dinner.

Why he’s afraid to flip through the pages, he is unsure, but he waits until he can’t standing doing so any longer. He’s flicked past several pages when he sees it: one of the first photographs he’d received from F.I. The accompanying article is titled “And a Partridge in a Pear Tree,” and discusses holiday traditions ranging from Christmas carols to in-laws getting drunk on eggnog. While the article is witty and well-written, Gerard is more interested in the photographer than the journalist.

The caption underneath the photo reads, *Three French hens take a snack break before the next line of the chorus reaches them*, which is then followed by, *photo by: Frank Iero, Senior*.

Gerard’s heart leaps high in his throat, because now he has a name and it’s *Frank Frank Frank Iero*, and then his breath catches hard in his chest, because *shit shit shit* he’s still in fucking *high school* shit this cannot be good at all.

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Gerard doesn’t leave his room during lunch the next day. He’s running behind and still needs to catch up with grading assignments before Christmas Break begins. The door to his classroom is closed and he’s so focused on the assignments that he almost misses it when the eleventh envelope slips beneath the door.

He only notices because of the light knock on the door that comes after the envelope has been pushed through. Gerard is up in a flash, yanking open the door so hard the handle knocks against the wall.

Frank is, of course, already gone.

Gerard imagines the air is still warm from his breath.

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Gerard decides that discovering just who Frank Iero is is more important than grading the last of his students’ art assignments before Christmas Break. This is last of the Twelve Days of Christmas and last day before the school lets out on Break. Somehow he knows that after this Frank won’t be sending any more photographs, or handwritten notes.

The thought frightens Gerard more than he cares to admit.

So he leaves his room, locks the door, and turns the corner towards the cafeteria as usual.
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He waits by the corner until he hears footsteps, and then a very quiet metallic sound as the lock is picked.

“Um, uh, Frank, right?” Gerard asks a little too loudly in the empty hallway;

The kid spins around so fast he almost loses his balance. Frank stares at him in silence as he walks over, eyes wide and frightened, fingers clutching at the thick envelope in his hands, lock-pick abandoned in the doorknob.

“That’s...” Gerard starts, nervously fiddling with the black buttons on his vest. He takes a deep breath and a step closer, feeling like a fucking teenager with a crush. He’s eighteen years old and in high school all over again. “That’s for me, right?”

Frank nods, licking his lips and gingerly handing the twelfth, and final, envelope to Gerard.

Gerard looks up, scans the hallways. He grabs his keys from his pocket, removes the lock-pick, and unlocks the door. Pulling Frank inside, he shuts the door and returns his focus to the object in his hands. He looks up and catches Frank’s gaze, not letting go as he opens the envelope. He’ll look at the photographs later; right now he’s interested in the note. Frank’s eyes flick from him to the note and he swallows audibly, glancing around as if to escape.

This time the note reads, *I think I’m in love with you.*

Frank is squeezing his eyes tightly shut, biting hard on his bottom lip.

Crowding him against the desk where all the other notes were left, Gerard brackets Frank in with his arms. He’s so close he can feel Frank’s breath hitch against his chest

when he presses a kiss to the underside of his jaw beneath his ear.

He knows he shouldn’t be doing this, but he’s got fucking butterflies twirling around in his stomach at the thought of *Frank* and he doesn’t think he’s ever felt like this about *anyone*. Fuck everything else.

“I think,” Gerard whispers, lips ghosting against the shell of Frank’s ear, “I think I could maybe love you, too.”

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